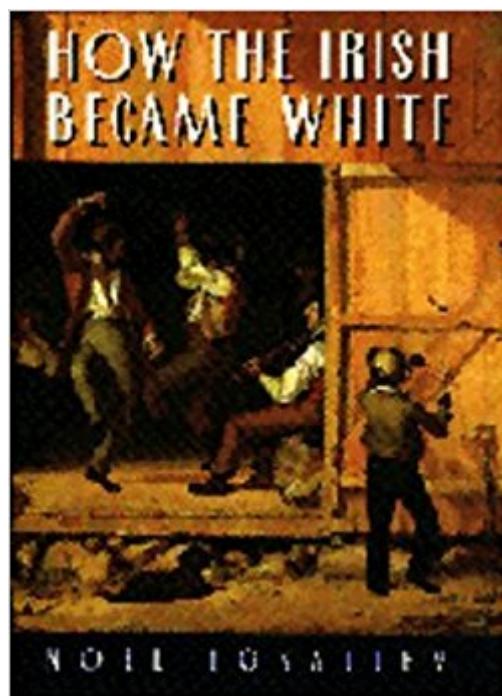


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# How The Irish Became White



## Synopsis

Ignatiev traces the tattered history of Irish and African-American relations, revealing how the Irish used labor unions, the Catholic Church and the Democratic party to succeed in American. He uncovers the roots of conflict between Irish-Americans and African-Americans and draws a powerful connection between the embracing of white supremacy and Irish "success" in 19th century American society.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the first half of the 19th century, some three million Irish emigrated to America, trading a ruling elite of Anglo-Irish Anglicans for one of WASPs. The Irish immigrants were (self-evidently) not Anglo-Saxon; most were not Protestant; and, as far as many of the nativists were concerned, they weren't white, either. Just how, in the years surrounding the Civil War, the Irish evolved from an oppressed, unwelcome social class to become part of a white racial class is the focus of Harvard lecturer Ignatiev's well-researched, intriguing although haphazardly structured book. By mid-century, Irish voting solidarity gave them political power, a power augmented by the brute force of groups descended from the Molly Maguires. With help, the Irish pushed blacks out of the lower-class jobs and neighborhoods they had originally shared. And though many Irish had been oppressed by the Penal Laws, they opposed abolition?even when Daniel O'Connell, "the Liberator," threatened that Irish-Americans who countenanced slavery would be recognized "as Irishmen no longer." The book's structure lacks cohesion: chapters zigzag chronologically and geographically, and Ignatiev's

writing is thick with redundancies and overlong digressions. But for the careful reader, he offers much to think about and an important perspective on the American history of race and class.

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In a book he admits raises more questions than it answers, Ignatiev, a radical activist and editor of the journal *Race Traitor*, asserts that the Irish were initially discriminated against in the United States and "became white" by embracing racism, a concept Ignatiev (citing Daniel O'Connell) says they learned in the United States. Ignatiev targets the Irish because they were the largest immigrant group to compete with blacks for manual labor jobs. Does American labor history dismiss racism as an element in the workers' struggles? Did oppression in Ireland under the Penal Laws help to make the Irish oppressors in America, or did they learn racism only after reaching America? While many of the primary sources support Irish racism, fewer support Ignatiev's opinion on where it began. This book is more a springboard for discussion than a source of answers but is strongly recommended for that purpose. Robert C. Moore, DuPont Merck Pharmaceutical Co. Information Svcs., N. Billerica, Mass. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Scholarly and academic. Not a casual read. Very useful for understanding racism and its dynamics in the United States.

great

I am truly enjoying reading about my Irish heritage and learning more about the Irish in America. The company that sold it to me, Simonbooks, went out of their way to make sure I was satisfied with the book and their support for my purchase. I appreciate everything that they did to follow up for me.

Eye opening; highly recommended to US History majors.

I have been recommending that students who do research papers on James Joyce read this to get insight into the oppression that the Irish have endured. It often comes as a surprise to many of them that Celtic people were not always considered "white" even though they may be aware they are not WASP. So this book teaches history to help put literature in its context.

Everyone should read this book

Regarding the "racist" claims, this book was recommended to me by a Park Ranger working on the Black Heritage Trail in Boston, a National Landmark. It is also carried in the book store at the Museum Of African American History in Boston. The most powerful line in the book is how slaves were not allowed to work on building Railroad bridges because they had monetary value. Irish, on the other hand, would not be missed if they fell to their deaths during the dangerous construction. Irish therefore had lower status than slaves in the mid 1800's.

Very beautifully and intelligently written with very interesting historical references and socioligical perspectives. Quite a revealing insight on Irish immigrant experienciences in the USA during the 1800's.

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